

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Origin, patronage and income

Origin

The name Kirby (Chirchebi in the Domesday Survey), suggests that the Vikings, who were originally pagan, could have re-named an Anglo-Saxon settlement that already had a church.¹

Although there are no definite Anglo-Saxon features in the present building, archaeological finds in the churchyard from this period include 100 sherds of pottery, a loom weight and a brooch.² A carved stone from the same period has been found in a Main Street wall.³

All three medieval Gothic styles are represented in the parish church. The south arcade of the nave is 'emphatically of the 13th century',⁴ with nailhead and dogtooth decoration of the Early English style. Much of the building is in the Decorated style of the 14th century, but there are later Perpendicular features, such as the screen and clerestories.

¹ B. Cox, *A Dictionary of Leicestershire and Rutland Place-names* (2005), 58.

² Leics County Council, Leics and Rutland Historic Environment Record, Kirby Bellars parish, 20 May 2011.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ N. Pevsner (revised E. Williamson), *The Buildings of England: Leicestershire and Rutland* (1992 edn), 191-2.

The first known incumbent was rector William de Pratis, named both in 1220 and 1231.⁵ There is no evidence for any dependent chapelries, although in 1319 the parish church was itself appropriated by the collegiate chapel, founded by Roger Beler (see below).

According to Nichols the parish church was originally dedicated to St Mary until it became conventual in 1319, but he gives no references.⁶ There appears to be confirmation of the early St Mary dedication in diocesan records with the mention in passing of the ‘...parish church of blessed Mary’ in 1319.⁷ However, the change to St Peter is not mentioned. Nichols possibly assumed that, in 1319, the dedication of the parish church would change to that of the appropriating collegiate chapel. Subsequent wills in the early 16th century confuse the picture. In 1520 one will mentions the parish church of St Mary.⁸ In 1527 another will mentions the parish church of St Peter and St Paul.⁹ Arnold-Foster gives the dedication as St Peter in pre-Reformation times but mentions no specific source.¹⁰ Ecton’s *Thesaurus* names St Peter at the time of publication in 1754 and it is the same dedication today.¹¹

Patronage

The earliest record of the advowson is from 1231, when the d’Ayvill and de Wastenev families each held a half-share.¹² The Wastenev half-share passed to John of Kirby, lord of the northern manor, who was presented to the living.¹³ From 1279 John of Kirby was often appointed keeper

⁵ Bodleian, MS. Rawl. b. 350, Kirby Bellars, 5 Hen. III; J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1795, reprinted 1971), II, 228-9.

⁶ Nichols, *History*, II, 228.

⁷ Lincolnshire Archives, Linc. Reg. III, 1319, 340-4; Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel of St Peter', 166.

⁸ ROLLR, wills 1520, 19, will of Richard Walker.

⁹ ROLLR, wills 1527, 27, will of Thomas Turner.

¹⁰ F. Arnold-Foster, *Studies in Church Dedication, or England's Patron Saints* (1899), III, 269.

¹¹ J. Ecton, *Thesaurus Rerum Ecclesiasticarum*, (1754), 238.

¹² Bodleian, MS. Rawl. b. 350, Kirby Bellars, 5 Hen. III; Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, III, 110.

¹³ F. N. Davis, ed., *Rot. Ric. Gravesend* (1925), 165-6. .

of the Great Seal of England in the king's absence¹⁴ He resigned as rector in 1279, but continued as patron until his death in 1290, at some point acquiring the other half-share of the advowson.¹⁵ He died in 1290; his brother and heir William of Kirby died without issue in 1302.¹⁶ In 1316 the patron was John of Hoby, the nephew of John and William of Kirby, who defended his claim to the advowson against Roger Beler.¹⁷ However, by 1318 Roger Beler had become sole lord of the manor and had acquired the advowson.¹⁸

In 1316 Beler founded a chantry with a warden and a chaplain. Initially the parish church remained independent of the chantry, but in 1319 Beler enlarged his foundation to a collegiate chapel with a warden and 12 chaplains, providing it with an additional endowment, including the advowson of Kirby church. The bishop, dean and chapter of Lincoln approved the appropriation of the parish church to this chapel, and the warden of the chapel became the rector of the parish. In 1359-60 the foundation (with rector) became a priory of Augustinian canons.¹⁹

The priory was dissolved in 1536.²⁰ The office of rector was granted to Oswald Sye, a London goldsmith.²¹ In 1550 the rectory and advowson of the parish church were acquired by Sir John Grey,²² thereafter usually passing with the manor until 1778.²³ Sir Charles Sidley then sold the manor to Edward Manners,²⁴ but the former Priory property and advowson went to Sir Charles's great nephew, Sidley Burdett of Foremark in Derbyshire.²⁵ The heads of the Burdett family

¹⁴ *Cal. Pat.*, 1272-81, 316.

¹⁵ F. N. Davis, ed., *Rot. Ric. Gravesend* (1925), 165; Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, III, 110; A. Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel of St Peter at Kirby upon Wreake', *Trans. LAHS* 16 (1929-31), 141-2.

¹⁶ Bodleian, MS. Rawl. b. 350, Kirby Bellars, 1302, 30 Ed. 1; Nichols, *History*, II, 224.

¹⁷ G. Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, III, 113, citing De Banco Roll 215, Trin., Ed. II, 1316, m.80.

¹⁸ LA, Linc. Reg. III, 1319, 340-4; Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel of St Peter', 143, 167.

¹⁹ See below.

²⁰ *VCH Leics.* II, 26.

²¹ Records at Augmentation Office cited in Nichols, *History*, II, 230.

²² *Cal. Pat.* 1547-53, 277.

²³ See above 'Manors and other estates'.

²⁴ DRO, D665 B/T4, title deed 1778; Nichols, *History*, II, 228, 232 (where Manning should read Manners).

²⁵ Nichols, *History*, II, 232.

continued as patrons of the parish church, with others from 1936, until 1993,²⁶ although in 1959 it was disputed that they were also lay rectors.²⁷

In 1936, both the ecclesiastical and civil parishes were joined with Frisby on the Wreake.²⁸ The agreement in respect of the advowson was for the Lord Chancellor to take the first and third turns and Sir Francis Burdett to have the second turn.²⁹ From 1987 to 1993 further reorganisation grouped Kirby with seven other churches into the Melton Great Framland Team Ministry.³⁰ Three parties shared the advowson, with the bishop having three out of the six votes, the Peache trustees having two votes and Major F.R.D. Burdett-Fisher having one vote. In 1993 the area of responsibility was changed again by the establishment of the Parish of Upper Wreake, comprising Kirby, Frisby, Hoby, Rotherby, Brooksby and Ragdale. The advowson for the new parish was exercised jointly by the bishop and the diocesan board of patronage.³¹

Income

In 1291 the taxable value of the church was first written in the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* as £20, which was quite high compared with all other Wreake Valley parishes except Melton.³² However the amount was later crossed out and a note added, stating that this sum was ‘cancelled through a process in a memorandum’ of 1344.

²⁶ G.A. Clarke, ed., *Diocesan Directory 1990-1* (Leicester, 1991), 50; Parish registers from 1812 to present in church.

²⁷ Correspondence from Messrs Corbould, Rigby and Company, 1959-60, in parish chest.

²⁸ Oral testimony of older residents in 1990s; Youngs, *Admin. Units II, Northern England* (1971), 226.

²⁹ *Leicester Diocesan Calendar, Clergy List and Year Book, 1937* (Leicester, 1937), 103

³⁰ G.A. Clarke, ed., *Diocesan Directory 1987-8* (Leicester, 1988), 52; Leicester Diocesan Office, Church Commissioners’ Scheme, Ref. 0196, 1 April 1993.

³¹ Leicester Diocesan Office, Church Commissioners’ Scheme, Ref.0196, 1 April 1993; Clarke, *Diocesan Directory 1993*, 54.

³² T. Astle and J. Caley (eds), *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae, auctoritate Papae Nicholas IV circa 1291* (1802), 65.

From 1319 the great tithes went to the chapel, later the priory. The bishop's agreement to this appropriation made clear the warden's responsibilities in providing for 'the cure' of the church and the souls of the parish,³³ but there are very few records of any stipend paid. In 1526, one of the chaplains of the priory was termed curate, and was paid a very modest stipend of 3s. 4d., although he would have received his board and lodging within the priory.³⁴

Following the dissolution, and the diversion of the great tithe to a lay rector, the curate was wholly dependent on a stipend from the impropiator. At this time there was no glebe land,³⁵ and no parsonage.³⁶ It was reported that the curate's stipend was £12 in 1605,³⁷ and was 20 marks (£13 6s. 8d.) in 1614.³⁸ Some curates received an additional sum, or board and lodging, as domestic chaplain to the lord of the manor: in 1633, for example, the curate resided in the house of the impropiator and lord of the manor, Sir Erasmus de la Fontaine.³⁹ In the 1690s, Joshua Gilbert was paid £6 13s. 4d. a year by the lord of the manor as curate for the parish, with an additional sum for being his domestic chaplain.⁴⁰ There were also surplice fees of 6d. for each churching and 5s. for a marriage, but nothing for burials.⁴¹ Notwithstanding the modest and insecure income, which in the late 17th century was one of the lowest of all Leicestershire

³³ Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel', 193.

³⁴ Lincolnshire Archives, Historic Mss Comm. XII, part ix, 560; H. Salter (ed.), *A subsidy collected in the Diocese of Lincoln in 1526* (1909), 98, 120; A.P. Moore, 'Proceedings of the ecclesiastical courts in the Archdeaconry of Leicester 1516-35', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, 28 (1905-6), 662

³⁵ Lincolnshire Archives, DIOC/TER BUNDLE/LEICS/KIRBY BELLAIRS.

³⁶ Lincolnshire Archives, Linc. Reg. Liber Patronorum 1605; W.G.D. Fletcher, 'Documents relating to Leicestershire preserved in the Episcopal registers at Lincoln', *AASRP*, 22 (1892-3), 134.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Lincolnshire Archives, LC, iv, Liber Cleri 1614; A.P. Moore, 'Leicestershire livings in the reign of James I', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, , 29 (1907-8), 166.

³⁹ *Calendar State Papers, Domestic*, 1663-4, 522; Moore, *ibid.*, 517.

⁴⁰ Lincolnshire Archives, DIOC/TER/23, 524-5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

livings,⁴² some curates had degrees, including Henry Meeke, curate in 1605, John Gretorex, inducted in 1757 and George Coulton, in 1766.⁴³

In 1721, curate T. Pocklington recorded the annual stipend as £15.⁴⁴ The following year the living received the first of four augmentations of £200 from Queen Anne's Bounty, the others being in 1767, 1788 and 1810, each by lot, without benefactions.⁴⁵ A statement given to the commissioners in 1767 recorded the stipend as just £6 6s. 8d., with a further £6 from the first augmentation, plus discretionary gratuities of £3 3s. in that year from the patron, Mr Sanderson, and £1 from Mrs Holden. A later statement of 1788, in connection with the third successful application, advised that since the death of Sir Charles Sidley some five years previously, his heir's guardians had only paid £5 annually. The previous two augmentations had been invested in land in Uppingham (Rut.) and Sileby (respectively 20 and 10 miles from Kirby Bellars), and brought in a total of £21 10s. annually.⁴⁶

Immediately prior to the next successful application in 1810, the stipend from the patron had increased to £10, the three augmentations were yielding a total of £57 14s. and a further £1 was derived from lands in Kirby and £1 from rent of the churchyard. Surplice fees were still 'a trifle indeed'.⁴⁷ Following this fourth award, total income in 1818 was reported to be £85 12s.⁴⁸ The lay rector was still contributing, but had not increased the stipend, despite the augmentations

⁴² J.H. Pruett, *The Parish Clergy under the Later Stuarts: The Leicestershire Experience* (1978), 82.

⁴³ ROLLR, 1D41/3, bishop's transcripts.

⁴⁴ LA, Gibson12, 172-4

⁴⁵ C. Hodgson, *An Account of the Augmentations of Small Livings* (1845), cccxxv.

⁴⁶ Church of England Records Centre, QAB/7/3/F2680.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Account of benefices and population* (Parl. Papers 1818 (005) xviii), p. 125

increasing the value of his advowson, for in 1880 the sum paid by Sir Robert Burdett was only £5.⁴⁹

The glebe comprised 25¾ a. in Kirby, Oadby, Sileby and Uppingham, and in 1887 was yielding £83 14s.,⁵⁰ although the curate's income fluctuated and had been as low as £60 for Henry Oakley in 1833.⁵¹ No vicarage was ever built in Kirby, but from the 18th century it was usual for the patron to appoint someone who already held a local living. They included Richard Goodall, curate between 1709 and 1712, who was vicar of Scalford,⁵² T. Pocklington, curate in 1721 who resided in the parsonage at Rotherby,⁵³ William Rollerston in 1853, who was also vicar of Great Dalby,⁵⁴ and H Woodcock who was curate of both Great Dalby and Kirby Bellars in 1886.⁵⁵ In 1890, curate Edward Ernest Farmer was also responsible for Asfordby and received £105 per annum. In 1894 Ernest Gorst received only £52 10s for Kirby Bellars alone.⁵⁶ In 1909 the living was held in plurality with Frisby on the Wreake, with income of £108 0s. 2d., and the sum was almost unchanged at £109 in 1918.⁵⁷

Religious Life

Medieval

⁴⁹ *Curacies and chapels erected into perpetual curacies through governors of Bounty of Queen Anne* (Parl. Papers 1870 (433), 48; ROLLR MF 259, glebe terrier 1821 and DE 801/12 terrier of vicarage 1880.

⁵⁰ *Glebe lands*, Parl. Papers 1887 (307), 127.

⁵¹ ROLLR DE682/5/1/1.

⁵² J. Broad, ed., *Bishop Wake's Summary of Visitation Returns from the Diocese of Lincoln 1706-1715, II Outside Lincolnshire* (2012), 765-6, 771.

⁵³ Lincolnshire Archives, Gibson 12, pp 172-4.

⁵⁴ ROLLR DE 682/5/2/1.

⁵⁵ Nthts RO, Box X922, 1-4.

⁵⁶ ROLLR, DE 682/5/4/1 and DE 682/5/5.

⁵⁷ Church of England Records Centre, QAB/7/3/F2680 ECE/7/1/60168.

In 1316 Roger Beler established a chantry chapel dedicated to St Peter. This employed two chaplains to celebrate mass each day, one in the chapel and the other in the parish church, praying for the souls of Roger Beler, and Beler's wife, parents, heirs and others. Roger Beler's grants to his chantry foundation included four virgates of land, four oxen, two cows, four horses, a sow with eight piglets, two new ploughs and two harrows. The chantry also received a total of 40s. annual rent from seven farms, and the rent of eight quarters and a half of maslin (*mixtilio*) from the wind and water mills, the latter being the earliest indication we have of the mills and that rye was grown in Kirby.⁵⁸

The foundation deed mentions a bell in the chapel, and includes substantial details about the different masses and the other offices and spiritual works which were to be sung each week. Two missals and two breviaries, both 'with notation', were provided, demonstrating the importance of music in the medieval church, together with chalices and vestments, and also livestock, to create self-sufficiency. It was very likely on the site of the later mansion, now called Park Farm.⁵⁹

In 1319 this chapel was enlarged by Beler to form a collegiate chapel, with a warden and 12 perpetual chaplains.⁶⁰ He gave this college five more messuages and crofts, including Broomhill (north of the church) and Wasteneyscroft (immediately south of the church), the advowson of Kirby church, the manor of Buckminster, and livestock and equipment for the chapel farm.

Vestments, missals, breviaries, psalters, chalices and a censer were also provided, together with 'a frontal with images', 'four score relics of divers saints with four phials of crystal with feel of silver gilt', and four crosses, one of jet with a golden image and three of silver-gilt, 'wherein are

⁵⁸ Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel of St Peter', 155; *Cal. Pat.* 1313-17, 438; LA, DIOC/REG/3, ff 211-213 (1316).

⁵⁹ See above 'Manors and other estates' and below 'Sites and Buildings'

⁶⁰ LA, Linc. Reg. III, 1319, 340-4; See Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel', 166-91 for a full transcription of the deed.

divers relics of saints and of the cross of our Lord'.⁶¹ Three masses were to be sung each day at three altars in the collegiate chapel and high mass was to be conducted by the warden on 21 occasions through the year. One of the chaplains was deputed to celebrate Mass daily at another altar in the parish church, in 'the chapel of Blessed Mary and St John Baptist', in a south aisle recently constructed by Roger Beler.⁶² The bishop, dean and chapter of Lincoln confirmed their agreement to the appropriation of Kirby parish church, subject to arrangements for the care of the souls of the laity.⁶³

Of the twelve chaplains, five were to be presented by the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln, three by Beler and his heirs, one by the Bishop of Lincoln, one by the Prior of the Hospitallers in Melton, one by the Abbot and convent of Croxton (Kerrial) and one by the master of the leper hospital at Burton Lazars. They were to live 'in the dwelling house next to the said chapel', where there would also be two serving men, whom the warden was to pay from his salary. Future wardens were to be presented by the dean and chapter of Lincoln, chosen from among the 12 chaplains.⁶⁴

As the chaplains were not monks they were not confined to a cloister-like existence, but were not allowed to 'roam about the town in the night' nor could they 'roam about the market place or markets [presumably at Melton] unless for a lawful cause' and having first obtained the permission of the warden or sub-warden. Their habits were similar to monks, but the white key of St. Peter was a distinguishing feature. They had to wear a decent round tonsure with ears exposed. There were strictures against brawling and defaming or speaking insulting words of a fellow chaplain and they were to 'refrain from keeping company with women and from holding

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. 184

⁶³ LA., Reg III, f. 345.

⁶⁴ LA, Linc. Reg. III, 1316, ff. 211-13.

talk with the same in the chapel or elsewhere'.⁶⁵

There were frequent changes of personnel and a shortage of suitable chaplains from 1319 to 1359, during which time there were 89 appointees altogether, although only 19 died in post, including six in 1349, at the onset of the Black Death.⁶⁶

The difficulties of finding sufficient chaplains led to Alice Beler, the widow of Roger, transferring the chapel to the control of Roger of Cotes, of the Augustinian house at Owston, in 1359. The collegiate chapel became Kirby Priory, with a head prior and a convent of 12 chaplains,⁶⁷ and survived in this form until dissolved in 1536.⁶⁸ By the time of this transfer, the college had been augmented by the advowson of Stapleford Church, the manor, grange and rents in Sewstern, and messuages, land and meadow in Belgrave and Thurmaston.⁶⁹

In 1392 the Priory acquired the advowson of Garthorpe church and 15 messuages, 10 tofts, approximately 400 a. of arable land and 30 a. of pasture, in Kirby and eight other Leicestershire parishes.⁷⁰ A Priory rental of the 14th century, which survives as a copy made in 1428, shows that the arable strips in Kirby parish were scattered through the three open fields, but there were also large acreages outside the open fields. The chief tenants were Ralph Leyk and Lady Alice Beler.⁷¹ A calculation based on the document suggests that the size of the arable strips averaged about 0.29 acres each and the annual rent paid to the Priory was about 4d. for every three acres.

By 1440, the priory had acquired a chapter house and a visitation found it to be in a satisfactory

⁶⁵ LA, Linc. Reg. III, 1319, 340-4.

⁶⁶ LA, *Epis. Reg. Inst., Gynwell*, 333-5; *VCH Leics.* I, 362.

⁶⁷ LA, Linc. Reg. IX, 1359, 372d-373d; Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel', 207.

⁶⁸ *VCH Leics.* II, 26.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Cal. Pat.*, 1391-6, v, 140-1, 151; TNA, C143/421/29.

⁷¹ TNA, SC 12/10/8, undated, rental of Kirby Priory.

state.⁷² However, in 1511 the priory was in ‘great decay’ and some of the buildings had been destroyed by fire. The pope and Henry VIII allowed the prior to declare indulgences and collect gifts in order to raise money.⁷³

In 1518 the buildings still needed repairing and an admonishment of the prior for omitting to provide the annual distribution of doles to the poor may be connected to difficulties in raising money for the buildings. At the same visitation, the sub-prior was found to be in possession of private property (a flock of sheep and other animals), contrary to the rules. Concerns were also raised about the possible immorality of a canon, the behaviour of three canons who spent time in their rooms talking and drinking late at night and the failure of the prior to keep to ‘the accustomed hour’ for the brethren to enter the dormitory each night.⁷⁴ In 1528 it was found that the canons were going out of the priory on their own to take exercise.⁷⁵ The building was now in good repair.⁷⁶ It was not a very wealthy establishment, having an annual income of £142 10s. 3¼d.⁷⁷

An inventory of the suppressed priory’s possessions reveals nothing unusual, although one chalice and a silver pyx containing relics is mentioned.⁷⁸ It is possible that other valuables had been sold to pay for the repairs of the building. The priory was dissolved in 1536,⁷⁹ and its Kirby possessions were granted to Thomas Thompson, the king’s sergeant.⁸⁰

⁷² LA, Epis. Reg. XXXV, Register of William Alnwick Bishop of Lincoln, 1440; A. Hamilton Thompson (ed.), *Visitations of religious houses in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1420-49*, II, (1918), 164-8.

⁷³ *L&P Hen. VIII*, 13(1), 575.

⁷⁴ LA, Epis. Reg. XXXVII, Visitation to Kirby Bellars on 14 July 1518 by Thomas Swayn, Commissary; A.P. Moore, ‘Proceedings of the ecclesiastical courts in the Archdeaconry of Leicester 1516-35’, *RPAAS*, 28 (1905-6), 656-7.

⁷⁵ LA, Epis. Reg. XXXVI fo. 16, fo. 142; A. Hamilton Thompson, *Visitations in Dioc. Lincoln 1517-31*, II, Lincoln Record Society (1944), 176.

⁷⁶ *VCH Leics.*, II, 26 citing *L&P Hen. VIII*, X, 496, and see below ‘Sites and Buildings.’

⁷⁷ J. Caley and J. Hunter (eds), *Valor ecclesiasticus temp. Henrici VIII* (1810-34), IV, 149.

⁷⁸ Duke of M/C’s MSS, no.29, cited in *Archaeological Journal*, 41 (1884), 89.

⁷⁹ *VCH Leics.* II, 26.

⁸⁰ Records at Augmentation Office cited in Nichols, *History*, II, 230.

The chantry, college and priory would have had a major impact on the life and devotions of people in Kirby, as the foundation documents required mass to be celebrated daily in the parish church, and the warden of the college and later prior were also expressly responsible for the religious needs of the people of the parish.⁸¹ A visitation report of 1518 indicates that the prior appointed one of the canons as curate for the church,⁸² and this may have been a longstanding arrangement.

Although the collegiate chapel appears to have been well supplied with relics, at least in its early days,⁸³ there is no evidence for any specific cults or guilds connected with the chantry or the parish church.

The names of some of the earliest priests of the parish church survive, including William de Pratis, mentioned in 1220 and 1230,⁸⁴ John of Kirby, who resigned in 1278 and Roger de Holte, who was presented in his place.⁸⁵ William Spigurnell was presented by Sir Roger Beler in 1315, and in 1319 became the first warden of the collegiate chapel.⁸⁶ The dissolution of the priory in 1536 broke the formal arrangement which provided for the religious care of parishioners. The prior received a pension, one of the canons went to Launde priory, which did not surrender until December 1539, and two canons expressed a wish to return to secular life.⁸⁷ Although no documentary evidence exists, it is possible that some continued to live locally and continued to administer to the people in the parish church, for the remainder of their lives.

⁸¹ See above.

⁸² LA, DIOC /V/j/ 7, folios 5, 83, 135, visitation to Kirby Bellars on 14 July 1518 by Thomas Swayn, Commissary; A.P. Moore, 'Proceedings of the ecclesiastical courts in the Archdeaconry of Leicester 1516-35', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, 28 (1905-6), 662.

⁸³ LA, Linc. Reg. III, 1316, ff. 211-13.

⁸⁴ Bodleian, MS. Rawl. b. 350, 5 Hen. III; Nichols, *History*, II, 228-9.

⁸⁵ F. N. Davis, ed., *Rot. Ric. Gravesend* (1925), 165; Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, 110.

⁸⁶ LA, Linc. Reg. III, 1319, 340-4; Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel', 166.

⁸⁷ *VCH Leics.* II, 26, 12.

An inventory of church goods was made in 1552, which included a silver-gilt chalice, a copper cross, two brass candlesticks, four bells (in the tower) and two handbells and silk vestments.⁸⁸

These would soon have been surrendered.

Reformation to 1662

No names of parish priests survive between the dissolution and 1605, when Henry Meeke was appointed as curate. There were 200 communicants at this time.⁸⁹ Bishop's transcripts of the parish registers indicate that Meeke stayed in post to 1618.⁹⁰ Everard Holman, 'minister, priest' completed the bishop's transcripts of the parish registers from 1634 to 1639, in which he recorded information about occupations of the parishioners.⁹¹ He may have been the curate who was residing with the patron, impropriator and lord of the manor Sir Erasmus de la Fontaine in 1634.⁹²

There is no clear documentary evidence of problems for the clergy in Kirby during the periods of Civil War, Commonwealth, and Restoration of the Monarchy. It is possible that there was some iconoclasm while De la Fontaine's mansion was garrisoned by Parliamentary troops. Today, in the parish church there are a few fragments of medieval stained glass in four windows and three empty 14th-century niches on the west side of the tower. Nichols also recorded damage to the plate accompanying two inlaid effigies on the floor of the nave, which are no longer there. There is no means of dating any of this destruction.⁹³ There is a gap in the records of incumbents from 1639 to 1661, and this may be significant. John Cawdrey M.A. had been inducted on 26 April

⁸⁸ E.H. Day, 'The Edwardian inventories for Leicestershire', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, 31 (1911-12), 459.

⁸⁹ LA, Bish. Reg., Liber Patronorum 1605; W.G.D. Fletcher, 'Leicestershire documents in the Lincoln Episcopal Registers', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, 22 (1892-3), 134; ROLLR, 1D41/3, bishop's transcripts.

⁹⁰ LA, Bishop's Visitation 1607; Fletcher, 'Leicestershire documents', 127; LA, LCV, ff 22-221; ROLLR, 1D41/3, bishop's transcripts.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Cal. SP Dom. 1633-4, 522; A.P. Moore, 'Metropolitan visitation of Archbishop Laud, 1634', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, 29 (1907-8), 517.

⁹³ Nichols, *History*, II, 232.

1628,⁹⁴ before the apparent appointment of Holman (see above), and he reappears as curate after the Restoration of the monarchy, with a (second) induction date of 6 August 1662.⁹⁵ Erasmus de la Fontaine (II) held the patronage in 1628 and 1662.⁹⁶ As a supporter of the Royalist cause during the Civil War,⁹⁷ de la Fontaine had been declared a delinquent against the parliament for executing the king's Commission of Array in 1642.⁹⁸ It seems unlikely that he would have appointed a curate with Puritan views, and Kirby's legitimate incumbent may have been replaced by the Parliamentarians during the interregnum, although no details of any accusations against any minister from Kirby Bellars were collected by John Walker.⁹⁹

1662-1945

In 1690 the north aisle of the church was removed,¹⁰⁰ presumably because of severe population loss earlier in the century, following the enclosure and depopulation already mentioned.¹⁰¹

With no vicarage house in the parish, incumbents were non-resident, but all those known lived within 10 miles of Kirby, and they appear to have taken regular services there. For example, under the curacy of T. Pocklington, resident at Rotherby parsonage in the 1720s, services were held at Kirby once every Sunday,¹⁰² and in 1767, when the incumbent George Coulton lived at Ab Kettleby, services were held each Sunday, alternating between morning and afternoon.¹⁰³

⁹⁴ LA, LCV, ff. 22-221; ROLLR, 1D41/3, bishop's transcripts.

⁹⁵ LA, LCV, Exhibition Book, 22-221; LA, subscription book III; ROLLR, 1D41/3, bishop's transcripts.

⁹⁶ TNA, PRO, CP25/2/677/14 CHASII/TRIN.

⁹⁷ Nichols, *History*, II, 232.

⁹⁸ TNA, PRO, C3 Chancery Proc., ii, 453, 16, 1648; Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, 129.

⁹⁹ A.G. Matthews, *Walker Revised* (Oxford, 1948).

¹⁰⁰ *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, 37 (1961-2), 72, letter dated 22 Nov 1849 from manorial lord to curate re fragment of Schedule of Deeds, dated 1 May 1690, giving licence under Episcopal Seal of Lincoln to take down north aisle.

¹⁰¹ See 'Economic History'.

¹⁰² Lincolnshire Archives, Gibson 12, pp 172-4

¹⁰³ Church of England Records Centre, QAB/7/3/F2680.

In 1778, it was reported at a visitation that the impropiator, Sir Charles Sidley, could have claimed exemption from episcopal and archidiaconal visitations, but readily submitted to them. It was noted, however, that Sidley, as lay rector, was tardy in meeting his responsibility to repair the chancel.¹⁰⁴ The basis for the possible immunity is not stated, although Nichols refers to the church as a donative,¹⁰⁵ which would have given exemption from visitation. In the visitations of 1793 to 1797, no mention is made of Kirby, at a time when the Burdett family had succeeded to the patronage.¹⁰⁶

By the 1840s, visitations were being conducted again. In 1846 it was reported that the incumbent was resident in the parish and that there was one service on Sundays, but there was still no parsonage house.¹⁰⁷

Morning worship on 30 March 1851, the only service of the day, was attended by 74 people, which was also the average attendance throughout the previous year. The church was large enough to seat 500 people. The incumbent, John Fox M.A., lived at Saxelby Rectory. He remarked that the population of the parish was scattered and some lived one to three miles away, and therefore attended churches elsewhere.¹⁰⁸

By 1886, there was still only one service every Sunday, but some had been moved to the afternoon, especially in winter. The average attendance for the afternoon services was 65, whereas only 45 attended morning services. There was a sermon at every service. The clergyman, R.H. Woodcock, lived at the vicarage in Great Dalby, where he was also curate in charge. There were 17 communicants in the parish, the average number receiving communion being seven

¹⁰⁴ ROLLR, LD41/18/21, visitation book, 261; W.A. Pemberton, 'The parochial inspections of James Bickham D.D., Archdeacon of Leicester, in the years 1773-1779', *TLAHS*, 59 (1984-5), 54.

¹⁰⁵ Nichols, *History*, II, 228.

¹⁰⁶ ROLLR, LD41/18/22, visitation book; W.A. Pemberton, 'The parochial inspections of Andrew Burnaby D.D., Archdeacon of Leicester, in the years 1793 to 1797', *TLAHS*, 63 (1989), 48-70.

¹⁰⁷ Nthts RO, Box X920, 1-4.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: PRO HO 129/418, Religious census 1851.

usually, but eleven at the great festivals. Reverend Woodcock mentioned that the absence of a day school in the parish impeded his ministry, which was compounded by there being no suitable meeting room in the village.¹⁰⁹

In 1898 the number of communicants varied from eight to 18. In 1932 the number attending services ranged from six at an early morning communion service to 45 at an evening service in Lent. In 1934 the attendances were in a similar range.¹¹⁰

In 1936 civil and ecclesiastical parishes of Kirby Bellars and Frisby on the Wreake were united as one parish, with the vicar living at the vicarage house in Frisby.¹¹¹

Modern parish life

Throughout 1967 there were 74 Sunday services in Kirby with a mean attendance of 12.4.¹¹² The number of services gradually declined, although average attendance increased, and in 1990, there were 58 services and a mean attendance of 15.0. From 1987 to 1993 Frisby and Kirby became part of the Great Framland Team based on Melton Mowbray.¹¹³ In 1993, Frisby and Kirby became part of the Parish of Upper Wreake with Brooksby, Hoby, Ragdale and Rotherby and services rotated around the six churches.¹¹⁴ The average attendance at Kirby services in 2000 was 18.3 on Sundays. Ten years later mean attendance on Sundays was 20.5. Usually there are no services on weekdays other than those involving rites of passage.

Recusancy

¹⁰⁹ Nthts RO, Box X922, 1-4.

¹¹⁰ ROLLR DE801/9, register of parish church services 1898-1936.

¹¹¹ Youngs, *Admin. Units II, Northern England* (1971), 229; <http://www.frisby-pc.org.uk> (accessed 14 November 2010).

¹¹² Register of services 1966 to present, still in use.

¹¹³ G.A. Clarke, ed., *Diocesan Directory 1987-8* (Leicester, 1988), 52; Leicester Diocesan Office, Church Commissioners' Scheme, Ref.0196, 1 April 1993.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

In January 1607, Joyce Roper, wife of Walter Hastings of Kirby Bellars (and granddaughter of Sir Thomas More) was convicted of recusancy.¹¹⁵ At the 1662 visitation it was reported that a certificate of conformity had been produced for George and Elizabeth Latham, who had not been attending church.¹¹⁶ One Papist was recorded in the Compton Census of 1676.¹¹⁷ The visitations of 1706 through to 1721 record two Papists, a man and his wife.¹¹⁸

Protestant nonconformity

In 1669 it was reported that there were no conventicles in the parish.¹¹⁹ The 1676 Compton Census enumerated 100 conformists, one Papist and 3 nonconformists.¹²⁰ However, no Protestant Dissenters were noted in other 17th century records, nor in the visitations of 1706-21.

At the visitation of 1886, curate R.H. Woodcock stated that about a quarter of the population of the parish were Dissenters, with 'Wesleyanism' the main form of dissent.¹²¹ If that was the case, those families must have travelled outside the parish to worship, as trade directories and chapel records testify that the only nonconformist chapel in the parish, in Main Street, was Congregationalist. It was built in 1865 as a subsidiary of the Melton Mowbray chapel, and restored in 1892 with 100 sittings,¹²² although there is a date stone with '1902' on the side of the building today. In 1884 the Sunday services were held at 6 p.m., so they did not coincide with the Anglican services.¹²³

¹¹⁵ *VCH Leics* II, 58.

¹¹⁶ A.P. Moore, 'The primary visitation of Robert Sanderson, Bishop of Lincoln, for the Archdeaconry of Leicester 1662', *The Antiquary* (1909), 464.

¹¹⁷ A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition* (London, 1986), 340.

¹¹⁸ J. Broad, ed., *Bishop Wake's Summary of Visitation Returns from the Diocese of Lincoln 1706-1715, II Outside Lincolnshire* (2012), 765-6; LA, Gibson12, pp. 172-4.

¹¹⁹ R. H. Evans, 'Nonconformists in Leicestershire in 1669', *TLAHS* (1949), 141

¹²⁰ Whiteman (ed.), *Compton Census*, 340.

¹²¹ Nthts RO, Box X922, 1-4.

¹²² *Kelly's Dir. Leics & Rut.* (1912), 115

¹²³ *Wright's Dir. Leic. and Fifteen Miles Round* (1883-4), 379.

The advent of new housing in the 1960s paradoxically seems to have adversely affected attendance at the chapel. The increase in car ownership meant that people could travel easily to Melton Mowbray and elsewhere for services and the influx of new residents included very few children of Sunday School age. The Sunday School closed in 1967 and at a meeting in August 1968 a resolution was passed to close the Congregational chapel at the end of the following month.¹²⁴ The reasons given were lack of younger people prepared to take charge, small congregations, resultant funding problems and no help forthcoming from the Leicestershire County Union. The building was sold as a private home and still stands as such half way along Main Street on the eastern side.

¹²⁴ Ibid.